Reinventing Adolescence:
New Rules for the Changing Family

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Abstract
This article examines current societal trends in marriage and family life in the United States, as well as how these trends impact adolescent values and behaviors. The postponement of marriage and childrearing, divorce, educational aspirations, and gender roles are discussed according to recent research. The societal shift toward egalitarianism in marriages is examined as well as the impact of women in the workforce and dual-career marriages. Suggestions for therapeutic intervention are discussed.

Introduction
During the last 50 years, modifications and alterations in marriage and family behavior have redefined the American family (Elkind, 1994; Hetherington, Bridges, & Insabella, 1998; Institute for Family Values, 1995; Samuelson, 1996). It appears that many of the current problems facing marriage and family life are not a result of a change in values as espoused by religious or political leaders, but rather the transition of societal norms (Elkind, 1994; Samuelson, 1996). Orthner (1992) believes "the rules of family behavior have changed so dramatically in some areas that many men, women, and children do not know how to respond to each others' cues and expectations" (p. 31). It is our contention that psychotherapists have also become confused in this transition and may respond from traditional developmental theory rather than from current research. If the rites of passage have changed for the typical

adolescent, the rules of therapy have also changed, and what was learned in training programs may no longer be relevant or effective.

Departure from the Traditional Family

During the peak of the traditional family experience during the 1950s, family roles were defined, and the expectations for raising children, selecting mates, and participating in intimate relationships were clear (Burguiere, Kaplish-Zuber, Seglalen, & Zonabend, 1994; Elkind, 1994; Orthner, 1992). Most men and women would simply adopt the roles of their parents. Cues were easier to understand and follow. However, society has become increasingly complex. Some researchers have suggested that men and women are unsure of others' expectations of them and their own expectations of themselves (Blakenhorn, 1995; Burguiere et al., 1994; Elkind, 1994; Orthner, 1992; Popenoe, 1993). Roles are no longer defined by a larger societal system but rather are more individualized, adding to the confusion and difficulty in determining the nature and status of marriage and family life in today's society. Burguiere et al. (1994) and Mitchell (1995) optimistically argued that as a result of changing views regarding acceptable marriage and family arrangements, future generations will learn to respect families, appreciate differences in form and concept, honor diversity in values, permit options, have compassion for the struggles of others, and be optimistic. Enhancing the sturdiness of the family is evident and continues to be viable for many people. The recent debate on gay marriage clearly demonstrates this generational gap, as Gallup Polls reveal that alternative marriages are more acceptable to adolescents and young adults than to older adults.

The Effects of Societal and Family Changes on Adolescents

The impact of these societal changes on adolescents appears to be an underrepre-sented topic in the professional literature despite the fact that adolescents are engaging in marriage and family life behaviors at an earlier age (Mitchell, 1995; Russell, 1997; Tasker & Richards, 1994). Sexual activity is beginning at younger ages (Mitchell, 1995; Westera & Bennett, 1994), and increasingly large numbers of adolescents have been exposed to non-traditional families and behaviors (Hetherington et al., 1998). In addition, many children are choosing to participate in long-term relationships at earlier ages (Westera & Bennett, 1994). Historically, birth rates began to climb in 1977. By 1989, the number of recorded births reached a high of 4 million and continued to increase through 1993. Mitchell (1995) found that children ages 18 and younger made up approximately 28% of the total U.S. population. This new generation of young people will have a significant impact on the attitudes and direction of our society. In addition, Mitchell believes their habits will shape America for most of the 21st century. Mitchell also suggested that this generation is significantly different from past generations in terms of race, living arrangements, and socioeconomic class. She reports that societal shifts and problems such as crime, violence, divorce, and dual career parents have forced this generation to assume more responsibility at an earlier age. As several researchers have reported, shifts in societal attitudes about premarital and marital living arrangements will affect the future attitudes and level of acceptance displayed by this younger generation (Amato, 1996; Kozuch & Cooney, 1995; Mitchell, 1995; Spruijt & de Geode, 1997).

How do these shifts in societal attitudes about marriage and family life affect adolescents as they attempt to define their future concepts of marriage and family life in America? Recent research indicates that there continues to be substantial intergenerational transmission of attitudes toward sexual and family issues (Amato, 1996; Leigh, Morrison, Trocki, & Temple, 1994; Spruijt & de Geode, 1997). Mitchell (1995) reported that children value their parents' opinions, especially when it pertains to questions about drinking, spending money, and sexual behavior. For example, parents who choose cohabitation or engage in sex outside of a marriage are likely to transmit these attitudes to their children (Amato, 1996). Brody, Moore, & Glei (1994) reported that parents often transmit norms, values, and belief systems to their children. Children find this information useful in guiding their own decisions and actions. However, dysfunctional beliefs are also transmitted; these ideas may be linked to troublesome behaviors such as early sexual activity.

Postponement of Marriage

Barich and Bielby (1996) stated that demographic changes in marriage and divorce rates, age at first marriage, and rates of cohabitation reflect the societal changes that have occurred. According to the Institute for American Values (1995), marriage as an institution is declining. Barich and Bielby (1996) reported that this decline could be seen in all facets of society. In 1993, 64% of White adults were married, down from 73% in 1970; 43% of African American adults were married in 1993, down from 64% in 1970; and among Hispanics, 60% were married in 1993 compared to 72% in 1970. Despite the decline in marriage, society continues to express a desire to be married and views marriage as a personal goal (Frazier, Arikian, Benson, Losoff, & Maurer, 1996; Westera & Bennett, 1994). Furstenberg (1996) reported that the vast majority of people will still marry at some point in their lives, and 71% of adults believe that marriage is a life-long commitment.

Current trends demonstrated by many of today's young people suggest that their attitudes do not support an overall rejection of the institution of marriage, but rather a postponement of the

process. The median age of first marriage has increased. Current estimates suggest that on average, men enter into marriage at age 26.5 and women at age 24.5 (Barich & Bielby, 1996; Russell, 1997). Several reasons have been identified regarding the decision to postpone marriage and family life. Some researchers argue that the overwhelming prevalence of divorce in today's society has been the main contributing factor (Brody et al., 1994; Conger & Chao, 1996; Hetherington et al., 1998; Johnson, Wilkinson, & McNeil, 1995). Others believe that society's increased emphasis on obtaining familial goals, such as employment and educational opportunities, are causing more couples to postpone marriage in pursuit of these personal aspirations (Barich & Bielby, 1996; Elkind, 1994; Kozuch & Cooney, 1995; Murray, 1998).

The Effects of Divorce

The prevalence of divorce in today's society may be disrupting young people's attitudes about the institution of marriage (Olsen & Defarin, 1994; Institute for American Values, 1995; Rogers & Amato, 1997). Current estimates suggest that approximately 1 million children are exposed to and experience their parents' divorces each year (Hetherington et al., 1998; Institute for American Values, 1995; Jekielek, 1998; Simons,1996). Further, an increasingly large number of children can expect to experience more than one divorce, as many parents will remarry and divorce again. Yet, how these societal trends have affected the attitudes of today's young people remains unclear (Institute for American Values, 1995).

Research findings on children's attitudes about marriage after parental divorce are contradictory (Tasker & Richards, 1994). Some statistics suggest that adolescents from divorced families are more likely to report that they do not want to marry, or they are more likely to express ambivalent attitudes about the ability of marriage to be successful (Kozuch & Cooney, 1995; Tasker & Richards, 1994; Simons, 1996). Other researchers have suggested that young people from divorced families express more positive attitudes toward marriage than their intact-family counterparts (Amato, 1996; Holman & Li, 1997; Johnston & Thomas, 1996). For example, Amato (1996) concluded that young people from divorced backgrounds are more likely to express positive attitudes about marriage, as well as the desire to get married. In addition, Amato's findings demonstrated that children from divorced families hold attitudes supporting marriage despite expressed apprehensions. Some children from divorced families will remain single, but these percentages are small compared to the overall percentages of young people who eventually marry (Kozuch & Cooney, 1995). Although divorce appears to contribute to apprehension and negative attitudes about marriage, these attitudes appear to have minimal effects on the decision to marry and start a family (Barich & Bielby, 1996; Kozuch & Cooney, 1995; Tasker & Richards, 1994). It appears that adolescents may be reluctant and yet will likely marry.

During the past 25 years, family arrangements have changed. In the 1970s, 85% of children under the age of 18 lived with two parents and 12% lived with one parent. By 1993, only 71% lived with two parents and 27% lived with a single parent. According to Hetherington et al. (1998) and Smith (1997), significant racial differences exist in family arrangements: 77% of White children and 65% of Hispanic children lived in two-parent homes. However, only 27% of African American children had two parents present. These realities appear to be affecting young people's attitudes on relevant issues pertaining to marriage and family life. For example, African American female adolescents may present a different opinion on marriage than Caucasian counterparts depending on family values and experience.

Research on the influence of parental decisions suggests that divorce has had significant effects on children and their interactions in intimate relationships (Amato, 1996; Johnson et al., 1995; Kozuch & Cooney, 1995; Rossi, 1997; Simons, 1996; Tasker & Richards, 1994). It has been suggested that parental modeling plays a significant role in how young adults perceive their own relationships and how they interact within them. Johnston and Thomas (1996) proposed that young adults practice and learn marital habits using premarital relationships. These authors suggest that observing poor marital patterns, such as those modeled by divorced parents, may become precipitating factors in unsuccessful marriages. Children of divorced families, especially those with increased apprehension, are more likely to view divorce as an option and may rely on this alternative if their marriages start to struggle (Amato, 1996; Kozuch & Cooney, 1995; Johnston & Thomas, 1996; Johnson et al., 1995; Tasker & Richards, 1994). Yet, psychotherapists are sometimes reluctant to engage adolescents in couple or group therapy where communication patterns are observed and modified. It is not unusual for adolescents to engage in inappropriate sexual behavior in school or public settings while adults observe in disbelief but do not intervene.

Education and Delay of Marriage

Several authors have suggested that, in conjunction with family status, societal factors have been proven to affect the timing of marriage and involvement in committed relationships (Hetherington et al., 1998; Holman & Li, 1997; Johnston & Thomas, 1996; Larson & Holman, 1994; Tasker & Richards, 1994).

Educational aspirations, economic prospects, dating, leaving home, and involvement in sexual relationships have all also been linked to the decision to marry (Holman & Li, 1997; Kranczer, 1997; Murray, 1998). Any combination of these factors appears to affect different

aspects of marriage and family life in America. However, of all the identified factors, educational and work aspirations appear to have the most significant influences (Clarksberg, Stolzenberg, & Waite, 1995; Furstenberg, 1996; Murray, 1998). Young female adolescents are pursuing different goals and aspirations than they did in the past. According to a recent study completed by the American Psychological Association, a task force on adolescent girls reported that young females today are more interested in their careers and in supporting themselves than in previous generations (Murray, 1998). Further, research has suggested that the trend to delay marriage appears to be for educational and financial reasons. Russell (1997) reported that preparing for economic independence is a high priority among adolescent females. Mitchell (1995) indicated that teenage girls appear to have increased career aspirations, especially if encouraged by their mothers and fathers to be self-reliant and independent. These female adolescents have been taught to avoid being dependent on a husband.

Involvement in early intimate relationships plays a part in the preparation and likelihood that young people will marry (Tasker & Richards, 1994). Recent trends indicate that young people are becoming more involved in committed, sexually active dating relationships at earlier ages (Hetherington et al., 1998; Stryker, 1997). Research has also demonstrated that more than 85% of teenagers in the United States report having a girlfriend or boyfriend and having kissed romantically (Styker, 1997). These relationships could be classified as being more complicated and involved than they were 30 years ago. Tasker and Richards (1994) suggest that adolescents from divorced backgrounds take courtship more seriously and initiate sexual activity at a younger age. It has also been suggested that these adolescents are more likely to classify sexually intimate relationships as important and commit themselves earlier in relationships. It is critical for psychotherapists to assess the link between divorce and early sexual behavior; it may provide an important point for intervention both from a parental and therapeutic viewpoint. Rarely does early sexual behavior lead to positive consequences for an adolescent, even though popular male folklore and advertising firms emphasize this conduct.

Young couples who marry early face a much greater risk of separation and divorce than couples who wait longer to marry. According to Murray (1998), 47% of women who married before the age of 18 saw their marriages dissolve within 10 years, compared to 19% of women who married at age 23 or older. The prospect of marital disruption is greatest among couples who marry at a young age, have a low educational background, have a cohabitation history, and have a spouse who has been married previously (Frazier et al., 1996; Holman & Li, 1997; Larson & Holman, 1994; Smith, 1997).

Women in the Workforce

Perry-Jenkins (1994) reported that although society has become more tolerant of women's employment, much of the current research continues to concentrate more on the negative impacts of women's work on society. Despite this focus, women's participation in the workforce has not diminished. The position of homemaker, often glorified in the 1950s, is less often a reality in today's society. Barber and Axinn (1998) reported that in the past 30 years an unprecedented number of women have entered the workforce, with the number of working women increasing 173% between 1947 and 1980. Wu and Baer (1994) reported that in 1985 over 47 million women were in the workforce and 85% of all working women were of childbearing age. These statistics and other research suggested an increased emphasis on career aspirations and financial security by women. These factors may also affect attitudinal trends demonstrated among young people toward marriage and family life (Brody et al., 1994; Elkind, 1994; Lye & Waldron, 1997; Olsen & Defarin, 1994).

Postponing marriage, delaying starting families, and foregoing marriage altogether have been cited in the research as gaining acceptance in today's society (Barber & Axinn, 1998; Perry-Jenkins, 1994; Thorton, Axinn, & Teachman, 1995; Wu & Baer, 1994). Couples are choosing to postpone marriage to pursue educational or career aspirations. Families are often started later, with couples having fewer children and some women foregoing marriage while still having children. These developments raise significant implications for marriage and family life in today's society. For example, Hetherington et al. (1998) reported that single mothers head approximately 50% of all U.S. households and are the fastest growing, yet most underprivi-

leged, group in today's society. The Institute for American Values (1995) and Hetherington et al. (1998) report that a vast majority of single mothers are under considerable emotional strain and economic pressure. The 1998 U.S. Census report found that nearly 6 in 10 children living with single mothers were near or below the poverty level. The research indicates that single or never-married parents are significantly younger, have fewer years of school completed, and have lower levels of income (Hetherington et al., 1998; Phares & Lum, 1996). In addition, children living in these environments often face more emotional, psychological, and adjustment difficulties when compared to children raised by both parents (Hetherington et al., 1998; Jekielek, 1998; Phares & Lum, 1996; Simons, 1996). Hetherington et al. (1998) suggests society has begun to accept unmarried parents and out-of-wedlock children. However, this acceptance of a culture of non-marriage has serious implications for future marriage and family life. Psychotherapists counseling adolescent girls who are sexually active are faced with a myriad of ethical decisions, knowing that if these children become pregnant, their lives and those of their own children are likely to repeat a cycle of low educational levels and poverty.

The increased number of women in the workforce has also had significant implications for the traditional "nuclear" family structure. Initially, the movement into the workplace was seen as a means of gaining independence (Burguiere et al., 1994). This trend has taken on greater significance as a second income has become necessary for family survival (Cohen, 1994; Elkind, 1994; Orthner, 1992; Popenoe, 1992). Many women no longer have the option to be solely a homemaker. However, societal attitudes continue to suggest that American families should model a 1950s family structure. Litman (1980) defined this dilemma as "being stuck somewhere in the discrepancy between reality and the

expectations of what it ought to be…" (p. 7). According to Crimins, Easterlin, and Saito (1991), a consumer hypothesis may best describe some of the difficulties associated with current trends toward nontraditional marriage and family structures. They proposed that high aspirations for material goods and living standards have contributed to nontraditional family and gender-role behaviors and attitudes. It is believed that these high material aspirations have encouraged women to enter into the workforce and continue working (Crimins et al., 1991). As a result, couples postpone marriage, families are started later in life, if at all, and women may choose to forego marriage yet still have children (Crimins et al., 1991). Furstenburg (1996) reported that the median age for marriage has risen from 20.3 for women and 22.8 for men in 1960 to 24.5 for women and 26.7 for men in 1994. The increase of women in the workforce has also resulted in fewer women remaining home with their children. In 1960, only 19% of married women with children younger than 6 years were in the labor market, and 39% with children ages 6 to 17. In 1986, 54% of women with children younger than 6 years were in the workforce and 88% with children ages 6 to 17. As a result, single working mothers have become a dominant force in our society.

The postponement of marriage and increase of mothers in the workforce have combined together to have significant impacts on the decline in fertility rates over the last 30 years, resulting in smaller families (Elkind, 1994; Kalish, 1994; Popenoe, 1992). Popenoe (1992) and Orthner (1992) reported an almost 50% decline in fertility rates between 1960 and 1990. Factors such as an increased desire to meet personal goals and maintain independence, more socially acceptable options for couples, an overall ambivalence toward commitment, and a growing dissatisfaction with parenthood have all affected the size and composition of America's families (Bur-

guiere et al., 1994; Elkind, 1994; Orthner, 1992; Popenoe, 1992). Furthermore, a decrease in the social stigma attached to being single has contributed to an increase in the decision not to marry or have children. Popenoe (1992) predicted that between 20% and 25% of today's young women will remain childless and nearly 50% will be childless or have only one child.

Gender Roles and Egalitarianism

Over the past 25 years, there has been a significant shift from more traditional attitudes regarding the appropriate roles of men and women with respect to marriage, family, and work. Holden and Anderson (1989) described traditional roles as those values held by the majority of people in the 1950s. Couples today tend to take a more egalitarian or modern view about their roles in relationships (Clarksberg et al., 1995; Thorton, Alwin, & Camburn, 1983; Kissman, 1990; Holden & Anderson, 1989). Gender roles are often described as assigned roles men and women should fulfill in their families and careers (Barber & Axinn, 1998). Societal trends and familial influences play a powerful part in influencing the definition of these roles. Perry-Jenkins (1994) reported, "the unequal division of labor that persists in families headed by heterosexual couples is not a function of innate biological differences between men and women; it is the consequence of how we as society have come to define what it means to be a man or a woman" (p. 170).

Historically, women have taken on the traditional role as the homemaker in the family. Caring for the home and the family became the woman's primary responsibility. In addition, motherhood was glorified during the 1950s and women became increasingly homebound. Holden and Anderson (1989) reported a smaller percentage of women were awarded PhDs during the 1950s than in the 1920s and 1930s, and the percentage of women in the workforce

decreased, especially among the middle class. Currently, this trend has shifted dramatically, and the number of women in the workforce has reached unprecedented levels in the past 30 years (Barber & Axinn, 1998; Holden & Anderson, 1989; U.S. Census, 1992). Educational attainment and gender role attitudes do not have a statistically significant impact on the decision to cohabitate but may influence the decision to marry. Cohabitation does not appear to present the same conflicts that are often experienced between educational attainment and marriage (Kozuch & Cooney, 1995).

Despite the declines in marriage and the increase in efforts to pursue more education, increases in cohabitation do not appear to be affecting gender role attitudes (Barber & Axinn, 1998; Wu & Baer, 1994). Liefbroer and de Jong Gierveld (1993) maintain that cohabitation has given women greater bargaining power within these relationships. Women are able to secure career plans and participate in a less unequal division of household labor. The lack of legal implications within a cohabitation relationship makes this partnership easier to accomplish (Gerson, 1985; Popenoe, 1992). Current societal trends toward an acceptance of nontraditional values and gender roles may continue to shift attitudes toward a more egalitarian perspective (Barber & Axinn, 1998; Orthner, 1992). Martin (1981), in his study of college undergraduates, found there was a strong agreement that childrearing should be divided between parents. In addition, he found that the majority of respondents agree that household chores should be divided equally, suggesting young people

view their relationships as equal partnerships.

Kissman (1990) determined education and support from family and peers are predictors of positive attitudes toward combining career and childcare roles. It has been suggested that traditional gender roles are no longer functional in today's society (Holden & Anderson, 1989; Lye & Waldron, 1997). It appears that current attitudes of young people lean toward a more flexible orientation of feminine and masculine roles (Perry-Jenkins, Seery, & Crouter, 1992). However, Bumpass and Sweet (1989) reported that rapid attitude changes toward a more egalitarian perspective concerning gender roles are not as strong as might be suggested. For example, these authors found that a higher rate of disruption occurs in marital situations in which the wife is more educated than the husband (Bumpass & Sweet, 1989). This phenomenon may be the result of a strong persistence by society to stay committed to patriarchal values with respect to traditional roles assigned to men and women. Currently, women often view their careers as being of equal importance to their husbands'. They choose to share in the financial responsibilities of the family, which often results in increased conflict within the relationship (Barber & Axinn, 1998; Bumpass, Sweet, & Cherlin, 1991; Kissman, 1990). Sharing in the financial support of their families (Orthner, 1992; Martin, 1981), women often approach their egalitarian roles with ambivalence as they attempt to balance the roles of motherhood and career.

One of the major issues in gender role divergence is the division of labor in a household. Historically, household work has been viewed as a woman's responsibility despite employment status (Perry-Jenkins, 1994). Married women continue to spend substantial amounts of time doing household tasks. Berk (1985) estimated that wives contribute about 70% of their time to household tasks. Hood (1986) and Perry-Jenkins (1994) suggest

that definitions of family roles and responsibilities are negotiated between both husbands and wives. The authors of this article propose that behaviors and roles within the family are determined by what both the husband and the wife view as important. Perry-Jenkins (1994) suggested, "If a husband sees housework as a woman's work, it usually becomes her job. It is whatever he does not do that the wife must do in terms of family work" (p. 175). Men who hold the attitude that they are the primary economic providers of the family hold more traditional views about gender roles (Perry-Jenkins, 1994; Perry-Jenkins et al., 1992). Male adolescents often describe themselves as egalitarian but express behaviors that demonstrate traditionalism in their environments (Clarksburg et al., 1995; Gerson, 1985).

Kissman (1990) believed adolescence is an important time for the development of roles, especially for younger women, where initial decisions about how to combine occupational and family roles are made (Corder & Stephen, 1984; Kissman, 1990). Strong, supportive family and community networks help develop more flexible gender roles. Today, couples want more options in terms of marriage and family life and their roles in these relationships (Elkind, 1994). However, Kalof (1995) reported that while both sexes attempt to reject a patriarchal model and strongly support an equal balance of power, this attitude might not become a reality. For example, adolescents' social and sexual relationships are far from equal (Brake, 1985; Roberts, 1983). During adolescence, conventional gender identities and sexual preferences are reproduced and not rejected (Haffner, 1997). Kalof (1995) believed that boys continue to maintain the advantage and hierarchy in relationships. If high school roles are still traditional, adolescents may receive contradictory messages. Wives who hold more traditional views about gender roles define equity in their marriages differently when compared to wives with

more liberal views (Perry-Jenkins et al., 1992; Perry-Jenkins, 1994). Many of our nation's high schools are similar in structure to nearly 40 years ago, and they present a confusing and less adaptive environment for many adolescents.

Hendrix (1997) described the importance of equity in intimate committed relationships and the many advantages of these relationships. There has been substantial evidence indicating the positive emotional and financial benefits of an egalitarian relationship. Yoger and Brett (1985) proposed that the attitudes of men and women toward the equity of gender roles are often related to marital satisfaction. Olsen and Defarin (1994) suggested a balance of power in a relationship is important to relationship satisfaction and mental health. While psychotherapists may model gender equity, their adolescent clients are often living in a world of double binds where direction is clearly lacking.

Suggestions in Adolescent Psychotherapy for Adapting to the Changing Family

While adaptation has become the slogan or mantra for corporate advertising, it is the core of therapy and reflects the constant demands of the profession. Our work is often focused on making sense of a world that is progressing at a frenetic pace for our clients. Adolescents are a particularly vulnerable population and can easily be caught in the vortex between childhood and adulthood. The developmental process for many adolescents has become increasingly confusing. It is our contention that the daily lives of these same adolescents are often at odds with the developmental theory that formed the cornerstone of therapy training. This changing family has led us to consider the following suggestions for adolescent psychotherapy:

1.) While familial stability is one of the major needs for healthy adolescence, it is becoming a rare structure. Therapists need to feel comfortable with themes of loss and abandonment while understanding the myriad of behaviors that evolve from these deep emotional traumas. While licensure boards demand a more distant relationship with clients, a paradoxical need for emotional connection exists for the adolescent client. Many adolescents feel desperately alone and surrounded by adults who are self-absorbed in their own grief.

2.) There has been a profound shift in helping families and parents/caregivers become competent parents. Boundaries have become so diffuse in many families that adolescents spend significant amounts of time without any supervision, while others in lower-economic-status families work at nearly full-time jobs to support their siblings. It has been our experience that families can often receive confusing information from a variety of therapists regarding family discipline, rules for communication, academic guidance, and other issues. These guidelines too often depend on the personal experience of the therapist, rather than proven or effective interventions.

3.) The impact of parental loss, most often the absence of fathers, is a continual issue for adolescents. Most single-parent families have a female head-of-household, and the evidence of success as a family unit is limited. The need to help these families is clear, yet the impact of therapy appears minimal. As the profession of therapy continues to evolve to a predominantly female profession, the issue of understanding opposite genders becomes even more critical, particularly for adolescent males who are most likely to display overtly aggressive and damaging behavior.

4.) The issue of sexual activity among adolescents has reached a crisis stage. Therapists need to feel comfortable in this area while clearly understanding and integrating factual information. According to the Centers for Disease Control, the rate of sexually transmitted disease infection and transmission is higher in the United States than in any other industrialized nation, with adolescents and young adults representing the largest-growth group. More than half of sexually active adolescents do not use any form of birth control, and sexually oriented crimes are increasing among this age group. Adolescents are living in a sexualized world surrounded by adults who also may be demonstrative of their own sexual needs as they seek new partners. Yet, limited guidelines exist for therapeutic intervention.

5.) While adolescents are a resilient group, therapists need to understand attachment theory and its relationship to the ability of adolescents to emotionally bond with new adults or siblings who enter their lives. For many adolescents, shifting family structures are a common occurrence with few guidelines. Therapeutic effectiveness is clearly needed, particularly for remarriages, which statistically have a higher rate of divorce than first marriages. Adding significant family transitions to an evolving adolescent schema is often counterproductive to traditional developmental theory.

6.) The core of individuation is familial stability. The love and caring inherent in a healthy family allows the adolescent to leave home without serious conflict or schism. However, a lack of this stability may result in adolescents who do not leave home, or who leave with a great deal of family conflict. For example, families of divorce with confused or ill-defined family roles create a distorted individuation and leave the adolescent developmentally trapped. Therapists need to continually redefine developmental theory as it relates to the nontraditional family and the strengths these families possess.

Conclusion

The choices facing today's adolescents are becoming increasingly complex. Societal attitudes toward marriage and family life are in flux, and adolescents are often confused regarding appropriate and useful roles in their intimate relationships. The traditional American family of the 1950s is quietly disappearing as society ventures toward the

unknown. Adolescents need stability in order to develop self-reliance and maintain the capacity for intimacy in their relationships. Much like technology has impacted our lives, many adults present a confused and disoriented view of adult roles and relationships to emerging adolescents. In response, adolescents will often display maladaptive behavior as a method to seek stability and a definition of roles. As therapists and researchers attempt to define human potential, the authors of this article hope the family can continue to transform itself toward greater acceptance, integration, and intimacy. It appears that the adolescent may benefit from this evolution.

Psychotherapists, when helping adolescents, need to be consistently aware of how their values regarding changing gender roles and family expectations will impact their clients. Discrepancies between the behaviors of psychotherapists and the values they espouse may become evident or be questioned by the adolescents they serve. As family life becomes increasingly complex, psychotherapists will need to continue to vigilantly assess and determine their roles in relation to societal trends and their impact on clients. Psychotherapists are in a unique position to integrate research in their clinical work so that their adolescent clients can learn to lead healthier and happier lives on their journey to adulthood.

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